Laying the Foundation

Lesson 3

THE BASIS FOR REPENTANCE

Catechism Two, Lesson 3

Reading: 1 John 1:5–2:6

1. Why Must Man Be Reconciled To God Through Repentance?

Sin broke all relationship with God—and still does each time we sin. We must realize the seriousness and gravity of sin. It cost the shedding of blood. Man was created for the pleasure of God, but both his fellowship with God and his ability to serve God were lost through sin. God’s purpose for man can only be realized by man’s reconciliation to God, which involves restoration in spirit, soul, and body. This restoration—often called “salvation”—brings life.

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? (Ezek. 18:23).

The Greek word soterion means “salvation or deliverance.” For this reason, the theological study of salvation by means of God’s intervention is called “soteriology.” This study deals with what God did and does to restore man to Himself; it is a much larger study than repentance, but it begins here.

A. God is perfect in holiness and cannot tolerate the presence of sin.

Man in his sinful condition cannot approach God directly and be accepted. Before God can look upon man, the sin question must be solved. God has done this by means of substitutionary and vicarious sacrifice. During the Old Testament times, the blood of sacrificial animals was accepted as a covering for sin. But this had only a temporary effectiveness. Not until Jesus Christ became the Lamb of God to die in our place was sin completely removed and sent away. His blood was perfect; His sacrifice of Himself was accepted by God as full payment for all sin forever.

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity … (Hab. 1:13).

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

B. Sin has totally ruined man’s capacity to please God.

The Bible describes man’s ruin as corruption and spiritual death. Theologians sometimes speak of the destruction of man’s capacity for God through sin as “total depravity.” By this they mean that man is not only lost, but unable to help himself. God must take the initiative in saving him.

What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water? (Job 15:14–16).

There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one(Rom. 3:11, 12).

2. What Is Sin?

Basic to all sin is selfishness as opposed to godliness. Sin is loving ourselves and preferring our own ways instead of loving God and seeking to please Him. Sin can be that of commission—doing anything which is not God’s will for us, or of omission—failing to do what God does will. Sin is the choice of our own will as against God’s will, the use of our capacity to make decisions to rebel instead of to obey.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6).

Both the Hebrew and the Greek languages use several words to describe the condition and expression of man’s basic selfishness and rebellion against God. Among the more common words for sin in the New Testament are the following:

A. Sin is missing the mark (hamartia).

The most common word for sin in the New Testament is hamartia (ha-mar-ti-a). This word summarizes sin as our failure to be the person God intended us to be. It means “to miss the mark; to be in error; to fall short.” We have missed the target of fulfilling God’s glorious plans for us. Because this word is used so often for sin, the study of sin is called “hamartiology.”

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

Hamartia describes sin in a threefold way:

(1) The source of wrong actions.

(2) A power which acts through the members of our physical bodies.

(3) Wrong actions.

B. Sin is moral wickedness.

Sin is more than doing the wrong thing. Mistakes are doing the wrong thing, but without the wrong motives. Mistakes are not necessarily sin. Sin involves the corruption of character. The Greek word kakos is often translated as sinfulness, because it emphasizes the moral badness or evil of disposition within man. It is from within that sin arises, because of man’s basic corruption.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man (Mark 7:21–23).

C. Sin is willful transgression of the law.

Transgression is the deliberate stepping across the border between right and wrong, the violation of God’s law. This stepping across is not accidental or without knowledge; it presupposes our knowledge of an objective moral law, a law outside of ourselves. Transgression is man’s invasion of forbidden territory or crossing over the moral boundaries God has established.

Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression (Rom. 4:15).

D. Sin is lawlessness.

Lawlessness is the temper of our times. This aspect of sin not only includes the indwelling source of sin and its many manifestations, but the guiding principle of life. Lawlessness (anomia) is a life style of refusing to be subject to God’s law. This is more than disobedience; it is a total disregard for the existence of law.

For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law … (Rom. 2:12).

3. What Does Sin Do To Us?

The most important result of sin is that it breaks our fellowship with God. But it also does things to our own inner workings. When we say that the wages of sin are death, this does not simply speak of the final accounting at the end of life. Sin produces results now. The death process is set in motion the moment we sin and cuts off the flow of God’s life. This is why immediate repentance is so necessary. Sin must be washed out of us before it destroys us from within.

A. Sin makes us less of a person.

Each time we sin, we become less the person we were intended to be. Something dies within us. We know something about ourselves that makes us think less of ourselves. Self-esteem is lowered. If we cannot respect ourselves, it is hard for us to expect others to respect us. We lose confidence both before other people and especially before God.

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God (1 John 3:21).

B. Sin creates guilt.

God has built into us an inner alarm system to tell us the difference between right and wrong. We call it “conscience.” It is possible to alter the conscience until it is no longer accurate, but its purpose is to give us basic moral guidance. When the alarm is sounding, telling us something is wrong, we call it “guilt.” This feeling of inner conviction demands attention. We must deal with it in some way. The two ways we can respond to guilt are: by confessing the sin and receiving forgiveness, or by seeking punishment—even if we have to punish ourselves. God’s answer to guilt is the way of repentance: confess, ask for forgiveness, receive His cleansing, and walk away from the sin.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

C. Sin begets more sin.

Each time we do a sinful act, this makes it easier for us to do the same thing again. Habits are created through repetition and reinforcement. We must allow God to interrupt our sinful patterns through giving us repentance and enabling us to renounce them. When we renounce something, we determine to be done with it.

But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God (2 Cor. 4:2).

4. What Does It Mean To Walk In The Light?

John is talking about continuance in God’s presence. God is light. If we remain in fellowship with Him, He exposes us to ourselves. Little by little, as we can bear it, He brings to the surface things that need to be changed in us, if we are to be conformed to His image. This light requires that we face ourselves and make the decision whether or not we will allow God to change us. If we cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He shows us what we look like to God, we not only continue to enjoy a blessed relationship, but we experience constant cleansing and growth. This is really another way to describe a life of continual repentance.

But all these things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light (Eph. 5:13).

5. What Kinds of Problems Often Hinder Our Walking in the Light?

Salvation is not a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It does not consist of initial repentance alone. Many of us do not understand that salvation has not only a past meaning, the forgiveness of our sin, but present and future application in being made like Christ. We lay the foundation stone of initial repentance in order to go on changing the rest of our lives. To go on changing requires the ongoing repentance of acknowledging our constant need of the Lord in practical daily needs. We have been confused about the nature of sin and of repentance, and this confusion hinders us from simply accepting God’s light and cleansing on an up-to-date basis.

A. We confuse temptation for sin.

Temptation is not sin. Jesus was sinless, but He experienced every kind of temptation. He was directly assaulted by Satan in the wilderness with a flood of temptation aimed at His most vulnerable places. Temptation is a strong pull or push to sin, but it is not sin itself unless we give in. As the song puts it, “Yielding is sin.” It is not the feeling of temptation but the decision of our will that results in sinful action.

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust [desire], and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (James 1:14, 15).

B. We confuse condemnation for the reproof of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit’s reproof comes as truth and as light. It makes manifest both the problem and the solution. It is specific. Condemnation brings cloudiness and a vague self-hatred. It tells us we are all wrong but does not provide constructive criticism. God’s reproof is uplifting and helpful; condemnation seeks to tear us down and to create general discouragement. The Bible tells us that God never uses condemnation in dealing with us; we do not have to put up with its bullying thoughts and feelings. When the Holy Spirit deals with us, even about sin and faults, He does it according to the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:1, 2).

C. We try to “earn” our forgiveness.

The price for forgiveness has already been paid in full by Christ. All we need to do to receive it is to realize and acknowledge our need for it, and to ask. Asking opens us to receive from God. The Bible does not teach that we need to have any kind of punishment inflicted upon us to make us feel sorry. The Holy Spirit gives us repentance, which includes both sorrow for sin and the ability to turn from it.

Him hath God exalted with his hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31).

Home Study: Lesson 3

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Why do we use the word “soteriology” to describe the doctrine of salvation?

2. How serious is sin to God? Give several reasons for your answer.

3. List four of the many kinds of sin mentioned in the Bible.

a. Sin is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

b. Sin is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

c. Sin is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

d. Sin is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

4. Since the most common New Testament word for sin is Hamartia, the study of sin is called \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

5. Briefly describe what sin does to us.

REPENTANCE PRODUCES